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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3765
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1583
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1450
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2019
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2515
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1347
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000632

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR/RPM, EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [SNAR](#) [NATO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN EXPANDING COOPERATION WITH NATO,
CONSIDERING ISAF SUPPLY ROUTE REQUEST

Classified By: CHARGE RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons discussed NATO's ongoing relationship with Turkmenistan and NATO's interest in an agreement for a commercial-based ground transport route for non-lethal goods through Turkmenistan to support ISAF in 12 May meetings with President Berdimuhamedov, Defense Minister Mammetsgeldiyev, Foreign Minister Meredov, and Parliament Speaker Nurberdiyeva. President Berdimuhamedov was cautious on the ISAF ground supply route, but willing to consider any opportunity to promote stability in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan was increasing the size of its 2008 Individual Partnership Plan (IPP), wanted to expand the Virtual Silk Highway project, sought assistance with handling radiological material, and asked not to be ruled out for future Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP) consideration. END SUMMARY.

ISAF COMMERCIAL TRANSIT AGREEMENT

¶2. (SBU) According to Astana-based NATO Liaison Officer for Central Asia Tugay Tuncer in a 13 May briefing to NATO embassy officials in Ashgabat, Simmons had positive meetings with the Turkmenistan government, including a Foreign Minister-hosted dinner. The top issue was NATO's request to establish a ground line of communication (GLOC) for non-lethal goods, including non-lethal dual-use items such as jeeps, through Turkmenistan. The route either would go through Turkmenbashi port via rail through Serhetabat, Turkmenistan, into western Afghanistan toward Herat, or through Farap, Turkmenistan, to Uzbekistan and then southward toward Kabul. This Western GLOC was NATO's secondary route and would first pass through Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and across the Caspian Sea. This ground route agreement would be based on an exchange of diplomatic notes and is intended to augment the NATO overflight and refueling agreements that are already in place. Based on the reaction of Turkmen officials, verification of the ground-transported cargo was a chief concern. (NOTE: NATO's primary route under consideration, called the Northern GLOC, runs through Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Russia and NATO recently concluded their agreement, while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan

are still considering the NATO proposal, which had been presented a few weeks earlier. END NOTE.)

TURKMENISTAN SLOWLY EXPANDING RELATIONS WITH NATO

¶3. (SBU) The discussion on the remainder of the NATO-Turkmenistan relationship revealed Turkmenistan government officials were positively disposed toward increased cooperation with NATO in numerous areas. President Berdimuhamedov expressed great pleasure with his participation in NATO's Bucharest Summit and his meeting with President Bush. Berdimuhamedov was well informed about the relationship and comfortable with Turkmenistan's status as a PFP country. Turkmenistan soon would be submitting a 2008 IPP that included 60 events, a leap forward from the formerly static 10-15 event plan that went unchanged for years.

¶4. (SBU) Related to the IPP goal of improving its civil emergency response capability, Turkmenistan officials requested NATO assistance with handling radiological material associated with the chemical, medical, and oil industries. NATO positively assessed the increased information-sharing on Turkmenistan's civil emergency development plans that occurred during a NATO Civil Emergency Planning team visit in February.

¶5. (SBU) Acknowledging the value of the NATO-supported Virtual Silk Highway project to the development of Turkmenistan's educational institutions, Berdimuhamedov requested NATO expand its support beyond the current 56

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institutions. A dentist and former Health Minister, he showed his personal knowledge of the websites, links, and various databases that are available for health and medical specialists. (COMMENT: This is the first concrete evidence we have that Berdimuhamedov is adept at Internet use. END COMMENT.)

¶6. (SBU) Berdimuhamedov also said not to count out Turkmenistan for future PARP consideration, which came as a bit of a surprise after years of no Turkmen interest. PARP fit nicely into the discussions with the Foreign Minister and Defense Minister on defense reform. Simmons offered to send another NATO briefing team to re-explain the process.

¶7. (SBU) On energy security, Berdimuhamedov declared diversification was important, but seemed at a loss to understand NATO's relationship to the whole issue. Simmons explained that NATO was involved in areas such as civil emergency response and physical security of energy infrastructure.

¶8. (SBU) Berdimuhamedov noted that Turkmenistan had a problem as a transit and target country for drugs flowing out of Afghanistan and was open to cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan. Without much detail, he said Turkmenistan officials had held discussions on counternarcotics with NATO officials in Herat.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: As a neutral country bordering Iran and Afghanistan, and near to Russia, Turkmenistan is being careful not to overplay its relations with NATO. Nevertheless, President Berdimuhamedov has proven to be open to a slowly expanding relationship with NATO from virtually the start. Positive experiences in meetings with NATO leaders likely have affirmed his self-image as an independent leader. At the same time, he may realize the value that a deeper relationship with NATO and its member countries can bring to building Turkmenistan's institutional capacities to international standards. With the confidence to manage any downsides to its growing NATO relationship, the leadership of Turkmenistan may also recognize that its experience with NATO, as an alternative to Russia as a security and capacity-building partner for Turkmenistan, is more palatable and holds better prospects for the future.

¶10. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Turkmenistan officials did not appear to view NATO overflights as a major issue. With no recent efforts by NATO to push Turkmenistan to accept a PARP, Berdimuhamedov's apparent interest in PARP is a good sign and may have been the result of the influence of Foreign Minister Meredov, who apparently liked the program after being briefed on the subject in the past. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND